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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-02 SAJ-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7883
INFO AMCONSUL LENINGRAD
AMCONSUL MUNICH

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 13354

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SCUL, UR
SUBJECT: A MUSCOVITE ART EXHIBIT: SOME (ALMOST) AVANT-GARDE
ART IS ACCEPTED

1. SUMMARY. AN ART EXHIBIT WHICH OPENED AUGUST 20 UNDER OFFICIAL SPONSORHSIP EXTENDS SOMEWHAT THE LIMITS OF "ACCEPTABLE" ART, AT THE SAME TIME THAT IT BEGINS MOSCOW'S ART YEAR WITH A BANG. SOVIET ARTISTS SEE THE EXHIBIT AS A TECHNICAL AND PUBLIC SUCCESS. SOME IMPORTANT PICTURES ARE ON DISPLAY. THEY FEEL IT IS A STEP FORWARD FOR SOVIET ART. AS AN EXAMPLE OF SUCCESSFUL COMPROMISE, IT ALSO SUGGESTS GROWING SOPHISTICATION BY THE AUTHORITIES, AS PART OF A COOPTATION STRATEGY WHICH REQUIRES GIVE ON THEIR PART TOO. END SUMMARY.

2. TWELVE MUSCOVITE ARTISTS (NAMES WILL BE FOUND AT THE END OF THIS TELEGRAM) HAVE OPENED AN EXHIBIT OF THEIR WORK AT THE EXHIBIT HALL OF THE MOSCOW UNION OF ARTISTS. THE EXHIBIT WILL RUN UNTIL AUGUST 30 AND IS THE FIRST MAJOR EXHIBIT OF THE ART YEAR (WHICH BEGINS IN THE FALL). ALTHOUGH THE EXHIBIT HALL IS PRIMITIVE BY WESTERN STANDARDS, IT IS EXCELLENT BY THOSE OF THE USSR. SIMILARLY, THE WORKS ON DISPLAY ARE TAME BY WESTERN STANDARDS. BY THOSE OF THE USSR, HOWEVER, THEY ARE QUITE ADVANCED. THE ABSTRACTIONISTS ARE IN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY AMONG THE EXHIBITORS, AND THE USE OF
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FORM AND COLOR IS MUCH MORE ADVENTUROUS THAN IS COMMON IN OFFICIAL

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SOVIET ART. SEVERAL ARTISTS CHOSE TO USE THE PALETTE KNIFE INSTEAD
OF THE BRUSH, AND THIS TOO IS UNUSUAL AND A DEPARTURE FROM THE
NORMAL CANONS OF OFFICIAL TASTE.

3. WE ARE TOLD THAT ABOUT 20 PERCENT OF THE WORKS THAT THE
ARTISTS OFFERED FOR DISPLAY WERE TURNED DOWN AS TOO
ANTI-SOVIET, RELIGIOUS OR EROTIC. THE LAST CATEGORY ACCOUNTED
FOR THE LARGEST PROPORTION OF THE REFUSALS TO EXHIBIT.
IN SOME CASES, ARTISTS WERE TOLD THAT WORKS REFUSED THIS
YEAR MIGHT BE ACCEPTED IN FUTURE SHOWS.
WE ARE TOLD THAT THE MORE LIBERAL WING OF THE MOSCOW ARTISTS'
UNION, WHICH SECURED APPROVAL FOR THE EXHIBIT, HOPES TO USE
IT TO EDUCATE SOME OF THE MORE UNRECONSTRUCTED SOCIALIST REALISTS IN
THE UNION'S DIRECTING BODIES. ONE ARTIST WAS TOLD THIS AND
AGREED NOT TO PUSH THIS YEAR FOR INCLUSION OF SOME OF HIS MORE
"FAR-OUT" WORKS, ACCEPTING THE ARGUMENT OF THE LIBERAL WING OF THE
UNION. DESPITE THE REFUSALS TO EXHIBIT CERTAIN OF THE WORKS OFFERED,
EACH ARTIST HAS 10 OR 12 ITEMS ON DISPLAY.

4. IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT WHILE ALL THE EXHIBITORS ARE
MEMBERS OF THE ARTISTS' UNION, ELEVEN OF THEM PARTICIPATED IN
THE OFFICIALLY SANCTIONED EXHIBIT OF "UNOFFICIAL" ARTISTS HELD
LAST FALL AT THE VDNKH. THIS APPROACHES 10 PERCENT OF THE 1975
EXHIBITORS. SEVERAL SOURCES IN THE ART COMMUNITY IN MOSCOW FEEL
THAT ONE OF THE REASONS THAT PERMISSION FOR THIS EXHIBIT WAS GIVEN
WAS A DESIRE ON THE PART OF THE AUTHORITIES TO DEFUSE SOME OF THE
MORE ACTIVE ARTISTS WHO ARE KNOWN TO BE PUSHING FOR ANOTHER
EXHIBIT OF UNOFFICIAL ART. WE UNDERSTAND THAT SOME ARTISTS MAY
EVEN ATTEMPT TO DEMONSTRATE ON THE ANNIVERSARY (SEPTEMBER 15) OF THE
"BULLDOZER" EXHIBIT OF 1974.

5. WHATEVER THE REASONS BEHIND GRANTING PERMISSION FOR THE
PRESENT EXHIBIT, THE PARTICIPATING ARTISTS FEEL THAT IT
CAN STAND ON ITS OWN MERITS. EVEN THE ARTISTS WHO FOR
PERSONAL OR ARTISTIC REASONS DISLIKE THE EXHIBITORS AGREE
THAT THE EXHIBIT IS, IN THE SOVIET CONTEXT, AN IMPORTANT
STEP FORWARD, THAT IT IS VERY GOOD TECHNICALLY AND THAT
THERE ARE SOME PICTURES OF GENUINE ARTISTIC MERIT ON DISPLAY.
ALL AGREE THAT IT IS IMPORTANT, IN PARTICULAR, THAT SUCH
AN EXHIBIT SHOULD HAVE BEEN ALLOWED TO BE
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MOUNTED IN THE HALL OF THE MOSCOW UNION OF ARTISTS.
THE REVERSE OF THE MEDAL IS THAT SUCCESSFUL COMPROMISE IS ALSO
EVIDENCE THAT A SOPHISTICATED COOPTATION STRATEGY CAN BEAR
FRUIT FOR MOST OF THOSE INVOLVED, AT ACCEPTABLE COST.

6. EXHIBITORS ARE:
P.I. BELENIK
L.L. BERLIN

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I.A. BRODSKAYA
V.Z. CHUMACHENKO
A.N. DRYUCHIN
A.B. GROSITSKIY
N.I. KONYSHEV
M.F. NIKONOV
M.N. ODNORALOV
M.A. ROGINSKIY
A.S. SLENYSHEV AND
D.N. TSEL'KOV. STOESSEL

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